

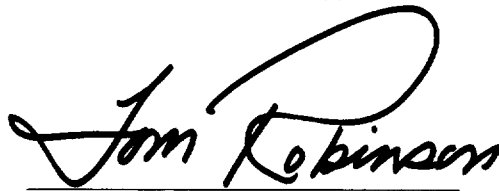
The Portrayal of Older Individuals
in Prime-Time Television Advertising

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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advised by
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "T". The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Muncie, Indiana

July 2001

December 2001

Abstract

This paper is the result of a study conducted on the portrayal of older citizens in prime-time television advertising. Before beginning this study, previous studies on similar topics and demographic information on older individuals had to be researched; from this research, the questions included in this study were formed. To answer these questions, a content analysis of four television networks, consisting of over 36 hours of television was completed. The content analysis examined the products being advertised, the number of people in the ad, and if any of them appeared to be 50 years of age or older, further analysis was completed. The approximate age of the character, and his or her race, social positioning, role, personality traits, setting, and the target audience for the ad are just a few elements that were examined in this study. After compiling the data from the ads that were analyzed, the results were interpreted and conclusions were drawn from the findings. In its totality, this paper works to describe and explain how older persons are shown in today's prime-time television advertisements.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks are due to Dr. Tom Robinson, my thesis advisor, for his role in this detailed and extensive project. He helped me choose this topic, and provided very useful information and excellent advice as he guided me through this process. This project could not have been completed successfully without him. Thank you, Dr. Robinson, for your wonderful guidance and your precious time.

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INTRODUCTION

As the baby boomer generation grows older and people continue to live longer, older persons are becoming the largest and fastest growing segment of consumers. In 2000, the Census Bureau reported 72,803 people ages 50 and over living in the United States, which is 26.9% of the total population (U. S. Census, 2). Along with their strength in numbers, 'older' persons are reported to have the largest amount of disposable income, spending between \$60 billion and \$200 billion per year on leisurely pursuits during the 1970s and 1980s, and these figures have undoubtedly risen since then (Festervand & Lumpkin, 165).

However, despite the fact that 'older' citizens make up a good portion of our population, and that they have an enormous amount of buying power, advertisers tend to ignore this important segment of the public when choosing how to market their products. As noted in the study by Swayne & Greco (1987), 'older' persons were used in only 7% of advertisements, compared to the fact that they composed 12% of the population at that time (47).

In addition to their underrepresented status in the media, 'older' citizens are sometimes misrepresented in advertising as well. For instance, a 1993 commercial advertising Doritos Tortilla Thins portrays an elderly woman as a doddering old fool, and in another spot for Denny's restaurant, an older person, obviously addled, stumbles over the chain's name, calling it Lenny's (Goldman, B4). While misrepresentation is not as widespread as the lack of 'older' citizens in advertising, it is an important issue in the advertising industry where a majority of the consuming market is 'older.'

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to focus on the portrayal of 'older' citizens in prime-time television advertising to see how advertisers cast 'older' persons, and to what extent 'older' people are used in advertising in comparison with their actual population. Prime time in the Midwest region of the U.S. is defined as 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. Four major networks (CBS, NBC, ABC, and FOX) were included in the study, with three different nights from each station being coded for a total of 36 hours of prime-television. Local advertisements were excluded from the study, as this research focused on nationally broadcast advertisements.

Similar studies have been conducted on this same topic over the past thirty years. In 1983, Hiemstra, Goodman, Middlemiss, Vosco, and Ziegler studied commercials during half hour time slots during the day, on weekends and at night, while in Moore & Cadeau's (1985) Canadian study, they studied prime time television commercials over the course of a week. Most recently, in 1995, Robinson, Duet, and Smith conducted a study on prime-time television on three major networks to determine how the elderly are targeted in advertising.

Thus, this study will help to further research already done on this topic by providing insight to the trends and changes that have occurred in prime-time television advertising over the past several years. Additionally, studying the portrayal of 'older' persons in advertising will show how advertisers view this segment of the consumer population.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following selected articles on past research conducted on the older audience, the older consumer, and the older individuals' portrayal in advertising are presented in topical order. The following information reviews studies on older individuals' portrayals in television commercials. Each article review begins with a brief description of the study's purpose, an examination of the methodology, and a discussion of the results and conclusions.

Several researchers have examined the portrayal of older individuals on television commercials. Hiemstra, Goodman, Middlemiss, Vosco, and Ziegler (1983) conducted a content analysis of a variety of half-hour time slots on weekends, weekdays, and evenings from three major commercial networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) to determine the image of aging on television advertisements. The researchers examined a total of 136 commercials identifying all characters over the age of 50, but concentrating specifically on actors age 60 and over. In addition to age and other demographic data, coders identified the older individual's appearance, behaviors and types of roles they portrayed. The authors were interested in determining "1) the extent to which older persons (50 years of age or older) are represented in television commercials, 2) the extent of the portrayal of older women, 3) the realism of the portrayal of older people, 4) how families are portrayed in relation to older people being present, 5) the nature of the product when older persons are present, and 6) the overall tone of commercials relative to any glorification of youth" (115-116).

The results of the Hiemstra et al. (1983) content analysis provided information relative to the six areas of interest. First, only 32 commercials had one or more

characters 50 years or older and only 11 (3.1%) commercials contained characters believed to be over the age of 60, providing little representation of the over 50 crowd. Second, the representation of women over the age of 60 was less than 1% of the total number of characters. The third area of examination was how realistically older people are portrayed in commercials. The researchers found that there was an absence of older physical characteristics such as balding, and individuals with wrinkled skin. Hiemstra et al. (1983) explain that this is the result of advertisers portraying the old as “young-old” with a noticeable absence of very old people (117). Additionally, there was only one character from a minority group, a 50-year-old African American male. There were no minority characters found over the age of 60, which directly contradicts the census results of the time (1982) as they state “that 7% of all individuals in the United States who are age 60 and older are African American” (117).

Older individuals were depicted in terms of their family relationships as being alone with no observable family. Because many older individuals are involved in some way with a family, Hiemstra et al. (1983) found the fact that there were no grandparent roles surprising. Fifth, the advertised products which contained older people tended to deal with health products, food, consumer services, and household products. The age of characters was noticeable higher when a health-related product was advertised. The sixth area of interest pertained to the overall tone of the commercial in relation to youth and being young. In commercials observed, the central character was a healthy, often sexy or macho person in his or her early thirties. Sixty-six percent of all characters were classified as under 40.

The results of Hiemstra et al.'s (1983) content analysis are much the same as those found in other studies. Older individuals are underrepresented and older females are shown less than older males. The authors did identify problems in the representation of minorities by finding only one older minority character and the lack of a family situation for the older individuals. No attempt was made to examine advertisements targeted at the older market nor did the authors identify the older characters roles or portrayals. These areas need to be considered to better understand how older individuals are represented in advertisements.

In another study, Moore and Cadeau (1985) examined the representation of women, minorities and older individuals on Canadian television advertisements. Their sample of advertisements was taken from Toronto-based television stations during the prime-time hours across the days of the week. Coders were instructed to gather the following information from each commercial: "1) gender of voice-overs, 2) character's roles, 3) product types, 4) settings of the advertisements, 5) all older characters, and 6) visible minorities" (217).

The results of the Moore & Cadeau (1985) study revealed that the majority of voice-overs (88.5%) and main characters (57%) were male. The largest percentage of female main characters (41%) were shown in home settings as compared to only 7% of male characters shown at home. Older characters were shown in 8.19% of the advertisements and minorities were in a mere 3.63% of all commercials. Older people were used most often in food commercials and least often in beauty and hygiene product advertisements. Moore & Cadeau (1985) explained that the results in each of these categories are extremely low in comparison to Canada's total population.

Moore & Cadeau's (1985) study, which concentrated mainly on the role of women in Canadian television commercials, provides results about older individuals similar to studies conducted in the United States. In Canadian television commercials, older individuals are also underrepresented in comparison to their overall population. The authors examined the use of minorities in commercials and found that their representation was even less than the older individuals. There was no information given on the use of older minorities in advertisements, which may have provided interesting results about their representation.

In a more recent study, Swayne & Greco (1987) conducted a content analysis of television commercials to determine how older individuals were represented and what roles they portrayed in the advertisements. Their study consisted of 36 hours from a variety of time periods on three major television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) during the month of November. A total of 814 advertisements were viewed; the information gathered from the advertisements included "1) the number of people in the advertisements, 2) number of older persons, 3) role of the older individuals, 4) type of character played by the older person (advisor, information receiver, humorous, or feeble), 5) positioning of older individuals with other people, 6) the setting of the advertisement, and 7) intended audience" (48). Older individuals in this study were defined as persons 65 years or older.

The results from the Swayne & Greco (1987) study determined that older individuals were underrepresented in television advertisements (total advertisements with nonolder persons was 665 while total advertisements with older persons was 50). The total number of people in the television advertisements was 3,109 and only 3.2% of those

individuals were over the age of 65. Older females were more frequent than older males (57 females and 43 males) and 52.6% of these advertisements contained females only.

In examining the roles of older individuals, Swayne & Greco (1987) found that in the advertisements containing older persons, 56% played minor roles, 31.6% played major roles, and 12.3% played background roles. The type of characters portrayed by the majority of older individuals was an advisor (65.2%); 15.2% were information receivers, 12% were in humorous or comical roles, and 6.5% were shown as feeble or confused. Positioning of the older individuals in the advertisements have them 75% of the time appearing with persons of other ages, 14% alone, 8% were all older persons, and 4% were children. The most popular setting for advertisements with older individuals was 1) the home (56%), following by 2) business (18%), and 3) outdoors (12%).

The final area Swayne & Greco (1987) looked at was the type of products older individuals advertise. Thirty-six percent of the advertisements containing older characters were for food products with a broad appeal such as coffee, soup, and oatmeal. The next largest percentage was for public service announcements (16%), followed by retail advertising (12%), cosmetics (8%), weight control products (6%), health products (6%), and security items (4%).

Swayne & Greco's (1987) study provides valuable insight into the use of older individuals in television advertising. Their results indicate that older individuals are underrepresented in advertising and are normally used in minor roles. The researchers found that there were more women in the television advertisements, which may be due to the examination of afternoon programming. Overall, this study was excellent in

determining the portrayal of older individuals in television advertising. They did not, however, examine the physical, mental, and personality traits (except for the traits of sick and feeble), which would have been helpful in understanding how the older characters are presented in television advertisements.

In a study conducted eight years after the Swayne & Greco (1987) study, Robinson, Duet, & Smith (1995) examined the portrayal of older individuals in prime-time television advertisements. The authors' intention was to replicate the Swayne & Greco (1987) study with some modification to determine if the findings were still representative. Robinson et al. (1995) looked at only prime time (7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.) network television advertisements because most of the older market's television viewing is in the evening and the commercials during these hours are seen as being useful in decision making (Burnett, 1991; Schreiber & Boyd, 1980). With this information, the researchers intended to find 1) the proportion of older individuals in comparison to the total number of people in the advertisements, 2) the roles the older characters have in advertisements, 3) the type of characters portrayed by the older individuals, 4) the number of people in advertisements with the older people, 5) if the older individuals are cast in stereotypical roles, and 6) if older individuals are in advertisements targeted for the older market.

Robinson et al.'s (1995) data were gathered from 36 hours of television programming on the four major networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC). Coders were asked to identify all advertisements with characters over the age of 65. Subjective criteria such as wrinkles around the eyes and on the hands, excessive gray hair, use of an

ambulatory aid (cane, wheelchair, or walker), parent of a middle-aged child, a grandparent, or reference to retirement were used.

Robinson et al. (1995) used a total of 714 advertisements with people as the basis for their results. Of the 1,783 people counted in the advertisements, 210 (11.8%) were older people. The number of advertisements with older men was larger than the number of advertisements with women only or with both men and women. Older men were used predominantly in major roles while older women were most often used in background roles. The authors believe this is due to the advertisers' relying on the older male advisor as the person best suited to sell products. As a group, older individuals were seen most often as part of the background or as a "set decoration" (7). Because of their use in the background, older characters did not actively participate in the advertisements and were cast mostly as neutral characters (33.4%). Advisor roles were next (30.0%), but a limited number of comical/humorous (13.4%) or feeble/confused (4.3%) were found.

Robinson et al. (1995) found that older characters were usually placed in advertisements with multiple age-groups (88.9%) instead of with children (7.1%), alone (2.4%), or with only older people (1.9%). This may be due to advertisers' using the "transgenerational approach" (French & Fox, 1985, 62), which states that if different age-groups are used in advertisements, the advertisement will appeal to many different ages. One of the most positive findings was that outdoor settings were the most common for older characters, a result that differs from past studies (Swayne & Greco, 1987) when the home was the most common setting for older characters. A wide variety of products and services were advertised by older characters, with fast food, food products, and retail

businesses being the most common. Of the 120 advertisements with older people, not one was directed specifically toward the older market.

The Robinson et al (1995) study provides support that older individuals are still underrepresented in advertising and there continues to be a need for major roles for this growing market segment. The researchers did find that 93% of the older characters were shown in a positive manner, which affirms that advertisers are limiting the stereotypical images of aging. The use of prime-time advertising in this study provides excellent results for this time period; however, extending the study into other time periods may be helpful in understanding the overall portrayal of age in television advertising. The authors did examine the targeting of the older market and found that no products were targeted specifically to this group. Extending the targeting to other time periods and the different types of media will provide a clearer indication of the amount of attention marketers give the older market.

A clear definition of an older person was not provided in any of the research on older individuals. The age was set at different levels (anywhere from 45 to 64 years of age) depending on the researchers. A definition of what constitutes a person being considered "old" is needed to accurately conduct and compare research in this area. Additionally, no researcher has attempted to determine the age or age categories of the older individuals in television advertising. The present research will do both of these to provide a better understanding of who the older individuals are and how they are portrayed in the media.

With the previous studies in mind, the following research questions were developed to help determine how older adults are portrayed in prime-time television advertising:

RQ1: Is the number of older individuals appearing in selected advertisements less than their actual number of the population?

RQ2: What number of selected advertisements in the televised media target older individuals?

RQ3: Are advertisements targeted toward older individuals related to their health (e.g. life insurance, vitamins, medicines, etc)?

RQ4: Do advertisements targeted toward the older market portray the older characters in a positive manner?

RQ5: Do advertisements targeted toward the “younger” audiences portray the older characters in a stereotypical manner (e.g., senile, poor health, etc)?

RQ6: Do advertisements targeted toward older individuals show the older characters in a home setting?

RQ7: Is there a difference in the overall portrayal of older individuals in the selected media?

To provide an understanding of the terms that are used as part of this study, the following definitions are provided in alphabetic order:

1. Advertising – Any paid form of targeted communication about an organization, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor presented through the mass media (Belch & Belch, 1994; DeFleur & Dennis, 1991). For this study, the advertising will be limited to broadcast advertisements on television.

2. Local Advertisements – Belch & Belch (1994) define local advertising as “advertising done by companies within the limited geographical area where they do business.” Examples of local advertisers include hospitals, grocery stores, realtors, and insurance salespersons.

3. Media – Often referred to as mass media, media are defined as the devices for “moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication. The major mass media in modern society are books, magazines, newspapers, motion pictures, radio, and television” (Defleur & Dennis, 1991, 22). This study will concentrate on the advertisements shown on four major television networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC).

4. National Advertising – According to Belch & Belch (1994) national advertising is “advertising done by a company on a nationwide basis or in most regions of the country and targeted to the ultimate consumer market” (714). Examples of national advertisers include Chevrolet, McDonald’s, Taco Bell, and Visa.

5. ‘Older’ Individuals – German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck has been credited with establishing the age of 65 as the minimum age for a person to retire in the 1880s (Morgan, 1991). Today, government statistical reports and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services continue to define senior citizens as those 65 years of age and ‘older’ (Healthy People 2000, 1992). Those in the medical profession agree that 75 is the age when the body becomes vulnerable to human frailties (Linden, 1985). Scholars conducting research on ‘older’ adults and the media generally use the age of 65 as the determining age for when a person is considered to be old (Northcott, 1975; Gantz et al., 1980; Peterson, 1992; Swayne & Greco, 1987). Others use an age of 50 to 55 to describe an ‘older’ individual (Bell, 1992; Hiemstra et al., 1983) which may agree with advertisers who believe “that 50 is the line that divides ‘older consumers from the rest of the population” (Linden, 1985, 43). Determining the presence of an ‘older’ person in these studies uses subjective criteria such as the appearance of retirement, extensive gray hair, wrinkles of the skin around the eyes and/or hands, use of aids such as canes or wheelchairs, the parent of a son or daughter who is middle-aged or ‘older,’ or evidence of grandchildren or great-grandchildren is used in addition to chronological age (Gantz et al., 1980; Peterson, 1992; Swayne & Greco, 1987).

Needless to say, defining the ‘older’ population is difficult. An ‘older’ person is defined in modern Western societies in terms of chronological age (the number of years he or she has been alive). In the United States in particular, persons 55 years of age and older are considered “senior citizens.” ‘Older’ people are generally divided into three different demographic groups 1) the young-old, 2) the middle-old, and 3) the old-old. This study operationally defines an ‘older’ person as those 50 years of age or older, and divides the categories as 1) young-old being 50-59 years of age, 2) middle-old being 60-69 years of age, and 3) old-old being 70-79 years of age.

In addition to chronological age, the terminology used to describe ‘older’ individuals must be determined. In the past, researchers have referred to older citizens as “elderly” (Bell, 1992; Festervand & Lumpkin, 1985; Gantz, et al., 1980, Greco & Swayne, 1992; Moore & Cadeau, 1985; Ursic, et al., 1986), and “senior citizens,” (Peterson, 1992), and “older Americans, adults, consumers, or persons” (Hiemstra et al., 1983; Swayne & Greco, 1987).

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (1994) states that the term ‘elderly’ is not acceptable as a noun and should be replaced with ‘older’ person. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) does not use the term ‘elderly’ and prefers that their members be called ‘older’ Americans or ‘older’ persons. For this dissertation, therefore, ‘older’ and ‘aged’ are operationally defined as the terms used to refer to those individuals 50 years of age and older.

6. Portrayal – The portrayal is the role, the type of character the actor plays, how the character’s personality, physical and mental state is shown, the ‘older’ person’s positioning in the advertisement, what type of setting the ‘older’ characters are placed in,

and what the overall portrayal of the character is in each advertisement. These definitions were provided to obtain accurate information in the content analysis. Each are defined as follows:

Roles

A role is the part that the actor plays in the advertisement. Actors will either be the main character or play some other supporting part in the advertisement. The use of major, minor, and background roles were borrowed from Swayne & Greco (1987) and Robinson et al. (1995) who found that these categories were an effective way to determine the use of the 'older' actors. The major, minor, and background roles are defined as follows:

Major Role – Includes all persons on camera that speak or have a dominant part throughout the advertisement, or those who are the main characters in the advertisement.

Minor Role – Includes individuals who are on camera for less than one-half of the advertisement, or play a supporting role.

Background Role – Includes individuals who do not speak or are seen in the advertisement only briefly. Crowd scenes, camera scans of a restaurant or park where people are present, but not involved any more than as inanimate objects used to develop the scenes, will be considered background roles.

Character Portrayals

Who the actors are representing or what part they are playing in the advertisement will be considered as part of their character portrayals. The character portrayals may be one of, but not limited to, the following:

Husband/Wife – A person shown in the advertisement with a spouse or one who appears to be with a spouse. To be classified as a husband or wife there must be a couple in the advertisement. An ‘older’ couple, of the same age, where there is an obvious family relationship or physical contact would be considered a husband or wife. For example, a woman and a man sitting on a park bench holding hands would be classified as a husband/wife.

Parent – An ‘older’ person who is shown with a middle-aged person in a family situation. A home setting, physical contact or relationship, and shown respect, in addition to what is said in the advertisement will determine if a person is cast as a parent.

Grandparent – An ‘older’ person shown with a child or young adult in a family situation. A home setting, physical contact or relationship, and shown respect, in addition to what is said in the advertisement will determine if a person is cast as a grandparent.

Owner/Boss – A person who obviously owns the business in the advertisement (e.g. Dave Thomas from Wendy’s) or a person cast as the boss of the particular business.

The business owner or boss is distinguished by having employees or people working for him/her.

Worker/Employee – A person working at a place of business where they are helping customers or serving others. Walmart often has advertisements where ‘older’ employees are shown helping customers. This type of character is not the boss or in charge of the company but rather works for someone else.

Consumer – A person who is shopping, purchasing, or using the product in the advertisement. A store or home setting will be key to determining if the person is a consumer. Individuals shown buying a product in the store would be considered a consumer and also individuals shown using the product. For example, a person driving a car that is being advertised would be characterized as a consumer.

Physical, Mental, or Personality Traits of Characters

The personality and physical traits that describe the type of person the actor is portraying in the advertisement will be considered here. These traits may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Active/Healthy – The person in the advertisement is involved with an activity that requires physical activity and a healthy body. Characters who are shown jogging, working out, playing golf, or participating in other physical activities will be classified as active/healthy.

Sick/Feeble – A person who is shown in poor health. The setting is important in determining if someone is sick. Being in bed, lying down, in a hospital or institution, or at a doctor's office all indicate sickness. In addition, signs of sickness in personal appearance (e.g. redness of face, swollen eyes, stuffy head, etc) and what is said in the advertisement will be used to identify illness. To determine if a person is feeble, physical signs such as lack of mobility, frailty, using a cane, walker or wheelchair, and being non-responsive to the environment will be used to recognize this characteristic.

Competent/Intelligent – A person who is cast as a doctor, scientist, teacher, or a person of knowledge will be considered competent/intelligent. While many characters may be seen as having intelligence, this personality trait takes into account the overall role of the character. For example, a man shown in a laboratory coat, recommending the use of Allegra for seasonal allergies would be considered competent/intelligent. In addition to his/her professional position, this person will be in charge of the situation in the advertisement will normally be an advice giver.

Humorous/Comical – This person is given a humorous role in which their character is the one responsible for making the advertisement funny. The character's dress, demeanor, personality, and mental state will be considered when deciding if a person is humorous/comical.

Sexy/Macho – This person is placed in an advertisement with the intention of looking or acting desirable. Personal appearance, dress, and what is said in the advertisement will be considered here.

Angry/Disgruntled – A person who is seen as mean, grouchy, irritable, or grumpy. Facial expressions, body language, demeanor, and what is said in the advertisement will be considered when deciding if a person is angry/disgruntled. A person that is irritated about a situation would be classified here but a person that is sad or sorrowful would not.

Happy/Content – A person shown enjoying the situation in the advertisement would be considered happy/content. Smiling, cheerful, relaxed, and peaceful would all be characteristics of a happy/content person.

‘Older’ Persons Placements with Others

The placement with others describes who the ‘older’ person was with in the advertisement. The placement with others may include, but is not limited to, any of the following:

Alone – When an ‘older’ person is the single participant in an advertisement. Situations where there is an ‘older’ married couple by themselves will also be included in this category to indicate that the couple is alone. For example, a husband and wife sitting on a swing, with no other people around, would be seen as a couple (alone).

With All ‘Older’ People – ‘Older’ individuals who are in the advertisement with other individuals their same age (65 and older) would be classified as being ‘With All Older People.’ For example, a group of ‘older’ people sitting around a table playing cards and the main character speaking most of the time would be a situation where the main character would be classified as ‘With All Older People.’

With Other Adults – The ‘older’ person is positioned ‘With Other Adults’ when they are with individuals who are not children and are not ‘older’ (65 or older). Examples would include an ‘older’ woman shopping with her middle-aged daughter, or an ‘older’ man buying a car from a middle-aged salesman.

With Children Only – An ‘older’ person is shown in the advertisement with only children. An example would be a grandmother reading to her grandchild, with these two being the only characters in the advertisement.

With Mixed Ages – Advertisements which have the ‘older’ characters with a mixture of other adults, children, and other ‘older’ people. For example, an advertisement for Ziplock baggies showed a family reunion picnic with many different age groups present.

Settings

The setting describes the place or situation the actor is in during the advertisement. These settings may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

Business/Work – The ‘older’ persons’ place of business, work, or the company in which they operate. Walmart shows their employees working hard in the stores, and Dave Thomas, Owner of Wendy’s fast food restaurants, is often seen working behind the counter at one of his restaurants.

Home – The ‘home’ setting is restricted to the confines of the walls in a house. Individuals pictured in the living room, kitchen, bedroom, or other room in the house would be located in a ‘home’ setting. Settings outside the home (yard, garden, porch, etc) would not be in the ‘home’ setting but would be placed in a different setting (i.e. ‘outdoors’).

Outdoors – All settings that are outside and are free from any kind of permanent shelter would be an ‘outdoor’ setting. A park, garden, beach, etc, are all examples of the ‘outdoor’ setting. A couple riding bicycles in a park would be ‘outdoors’, but a man in a greenhouse building would not.

Studio – The ‘studio’ setting includes those situations where the characters are in an artificial setting. Advertisements in a room with background lighting, props, and sets would be in a studio. A man walking through the set of a movie with lights and cameramen around would be considered to be in a ‘studio.’

Overall Portrayal

The overall portrayal describes how the actor was seen in the advertisement when all areas (role, type of character, character traits, and setting) are considered. The overall portrayal is limited to the following:

Positive – In a ‘positive’ overall portrayal, the ‘older’ character is shown in a desirable manner. The ‘positive’ portrayal is one that is free from negative stereotypes such as showing the ‘older’ person as sufferers in need of something or someone, or lacking in something that non-older persons possess. The ‘older’ person will be shown active, healthy, happy, working and contributing to society in a ‘positive’ portrayal. To decide if the portrayal is ‘positive,’ the coder would ask himself or herself “Is this how I would like to be portrayed in an advertisement?”

Negative – The negative portrayal is the opposite of the ‘positive’ portrayal. The ‘older’ character is seen in a stereotypical manner (e.g. sick, feeble, confused, grouchy, etc) and as an undesirable character. The same question, “Would I like to be portrayed like this in an advertisement?” would be asked by the coder. In this case, however, if the response to this question is no, the portrayal is ‘negative.’

Target Markets

Because each advertisement is geared toward a specific age group of consumers, the ‘target market’ age group for each commercial was divided into three categories: 1)

under 18 years of age, 2) 18 to 49 years of age, and 3) 50 years of age and older. The following criteria was used to the characteristics of each target market:

Under 18 years of age – Products such as video games, breakfast cereals, candy, and toys have advertisement specifically designed to attract children and teens. The age of characters, specific reference to age, and the type of product will determine if the product is targeting the under 18 market. An example of this type of product is the advertisement for Trix cereal with the famous slogan, “Silly rabbit, Trix are for kids.”

18 to 49 years old – An advertisement considered to be targeting the 18 to 49 age demographic there must be a specific reference, either verbal or visual, to this audience. In addition to age, the references associated with this audience may include activities, a way of life, or a position in society.

50 years of age and older –Because 18 to 49 year olds are generally the market that advertisers target, the ‘older’ market consists of those 50 and older that have a different set of products advertised to them. For advertisements to be considered targeting the ‘older’ market, there must be a specific reference, either verbal or visual, to this audience. In addition to age, references made about a way of life, a position in a family, or an advertisement with all ‘older’ characters will assist in determining if the ‘older’ market is the target audience.

METHODOLOGY

To better understand the portrayal of older individuals in television advertisements, this research used content analysis of national advertisements during prime-time television on four different major networks. Content analysis has been established as a sound tool for investigating the portrayal of groups by Bell (1992), Gantz et al. (1980), Northcott (1975), Peterson (1992), Hiemstra et al. (1983), Moore & Cadeau (1985), Robinson et al. (1995), Swayne & Greco (1987), and Ursic et al. (1986).

Because examining the portrayal of older individuals in the advertisements is the main intent of this study, all advertisements depicting people so the age categories could be separated. Advertisements containing network or station promotional spots, publication advertisements and/or house advertisements were not counted.

Advertisements that contained no people, or contained animated/computer characters or animals were counted in the total number of advertisements, but not coded for content.

Partial body shots of hands, legs, or feet were not counted as a person or character, however, close-up shots of faces were included.

There was no attempt to control for duplication of advertisements as many advertisers utilize high frequency of repetition as a technique to achieve brand recognition (Swayne & Greco, 1980). The coder was allowed to view the advertisements a number of times to insure the accuracy on the numbers of individuals and types of roles portrayed. The coder was trained on how to use the content analysis instrument, how to identify older individuals, their roles, character portrayals, physical, mental, and personality traits, and how to recognize possible problems in judgment that might occur during the coding process.

The Coding Instrument

The information used to construct the coding instrument was taken from similar content analysis studies whose instruments were found to be valid and reliable (Swayne & Greco, 1987; Robinson et al., 1995; Ursic et al., 1986).

The first section was to identify the specific television network, specific information about the medium, and the brand and product category in the specific advertisement. The second section allowed for tabulations of the number of people, the number of 'older' people, and the number of 'older' males and females appearing in the advertisement. Section three was used to record specific information about the portrayal of the 'older' individuals in the advertisements which included the older characters' approximate ages, celebrity status, their roles, the characters played, their mental, physical, and personality traits, and the setting of the advertisement. In addition, the target audience was determined relevant to their specific age groups, and the overall portrayal of the 'older' characters was deemed positive or negative.

'Older' characters were identified using subjective criteria such as 1) an appearance of retirement, 2) extensive gray hair, 3) wrinkles of the skin around the eyes and/or hands, 4) use of aids such as canes or wheelchairs, 5) the parent of a son or daughter who is middle-aged or older, or 6) evidence of grandchildren or great-grandchildren (Gantz et al., 1980; Peterson, 1992; Swayne & Greco, 1987). Only people whose faces were shown and could be identified by age and gender were counted. For example, a person sitting in the background at a distance where his or her face was not clearly exposed was not counted.

The specific techniques for gathering information in the content analysis for television advertisements are as follows:

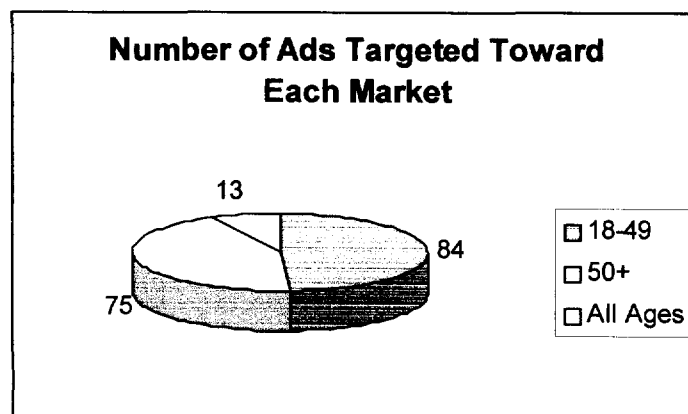
The advertisements were videotaped from each of the four major commercial networks 1) ABC, 2) CBS, 3) FOX, and 4) NBC on three random days during a seven-day week during the winter of 2000/2001. Each station was taped from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. each night, for a total of 9 hours of television per network, and 36 hours of prime-time television total. The videotapes were then watched and coded by the coder.

RESULTS

In the 36 hours of prime-time television that was viewed, there were a total of 853 advertisements, with 139 advertisements (16%) containing 'older' persons. There were 1,991 total people of all ages in the ads, with 139 'older' people shown. Thus, only 6.9% of all people in all of the advertisements were older, making this number far less than their actual percentage in the population of 26.9% (RQ1). Of the 139 'older' people in the advertisements, 115 of these people were male and only 24 were female.

The largest target market of the advertisements shown during prime-time television was the 18-49 age group, with 60.4% (84 ads) being directed at these consumers. Next, the 50+ category was the second largest market, with 53.9% of all advertisements (75 ads) being aimed at them; 9.3% of advertisements (13 ads) were aimed at all age groups (RQ2). Some target markets overlapped, such as eyeglasses and health-related items. No advertisements were directed specifically at the under 18 age group.

ADVERTISEMENTS GROUPED BY TARGET MARKET



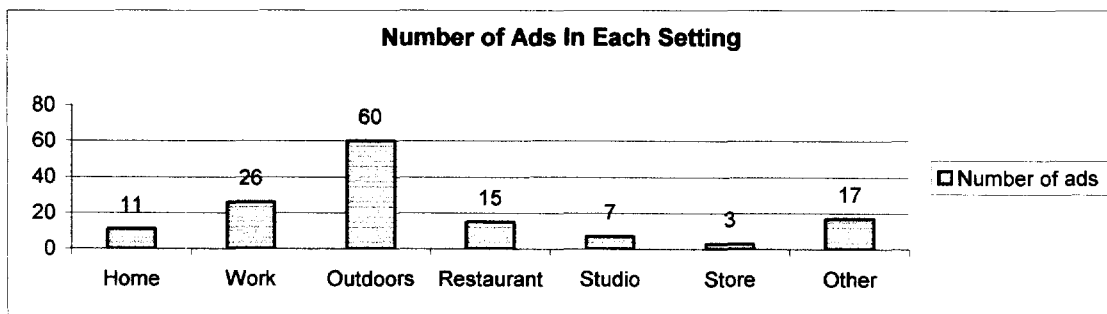
Of the 139 ads containing 'older' people, only 25 were health-related (RQ3). These advertisements included ads for prescription medicine, over-the-counter medicine, joint supplements, life insurance, and public service announcements for health services, such as a bone density test.

In the overall portrayal of 'older' citizens in the advertisements, 67.6% of the ads showed the 'older' persons in a positive light. However, 32.3% of the ads portrayed the 'older' people in a negative way (RQ4).

The advertisements targeted toward the younger age group (18-49) tend to portray 'older' people in negative, although not necessarily stereotypical manner. Of the 45 advertisements that did show 'older' citizens in a negative light, all but 11 were aimed almost exclusively at the 18-49 age group. Interestingly, all of the ads that pertained to technology (computers, digital phones, CD burners) cast 'older' people negatively (RQ5).

Of the advertisements that are targeted toward the 'older' individuals, most do not show the characters in a home environment. Most often, in nearly half of all the advertisements, 'older' persons were shown in an outdoor setting. The next most common setting was at a workplace, followed by miscellaneous locations and restaurants. Only 11 'older' citizens were shown in a home environment (RQ6).

ADVERTISEMENTS DIVIDED BY SETTING



There were distinct differences in how 'older' individuals are portrayed overall in the selected media. As previously mentioned, all ads concerning technology portrayed the 'older' citizens in a negative or stereotypical manner. However, only 1 health ad directed at 'older' individuals was negative. Of the other types of products advertised, such as entertainment, food and beverages, and hygiene, none predominantly showed 'older' citizens as either positive or negative; rather, there were mixed portrayals (RQ7).

Additional findings in this study included that 18 of the 139 'older' people shown were celebrities (Dave Thomas of Wendy's, Tommy Lee Jones, and John Lithgow, to name a few), and that 'older' minorities were not well-represented in the advertisements, with only 15.8% of all 'older' characters belonging to a minority group. Also, the 'older' persons were most often shown as consumers (33.1%), followed by miscellaneous roles (23.7%), owner/boss roles (14.4%), worker roles (11.5%), parent roles (7.2%), husband/wife roles and no specific roles shown (both 4.3%), and grandparent roles (1.4%).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study seemed to reflect those of previous studies, with some notable differences.

Just as studies by Hiemstra et al. (1983), and Swayne & Greco (1987) showed, the actual number of advertisements with 'older' persons (16%) was far less a percentage than the actual penetration of 'older' persons in the population (26.9%). This number seems to indicate that while advertisers do recognize 'older' consumers, they still do not place them in advertisements as often as they do other age groups.

Also, as Hiemstra et al. (1983) found, more 'older' characters were of the 'young-old (50-59 years)' or 'middle-old (60-69 years)' age categories, rather than of the 'old-old (70-79 years)' or 'very old (80+)' groups. In fact, only 23 of the 139 'older' persons shown were in the last two age categories. Additionally, as in Hiemstra et al.'s (1983) study, less than 1% of the 'older' characters were female. In this study, it was found that only 24 'older' women were shown as characters in the advertisement, making this demographic only 1.2% of the total number of characters shown in 853 advertisements. However, these findings are quite different from the results found in Swayne & Greco's (1987) study, as they found that 'older' females were portrayed more often than 'older' males.

'Older' minorities were also shown infrequently, with only 17 African-American 'older' characters, and 5 other 'older' characters of ethnic backgrounds other than Caucasian. However, this number has improved significantly when compared to Hiemstra et al.'s (1983) findings of only 1 minority character.

In their positioning, this study found that the majority (48.9%) of 'older' characters were shown alone. This agrees with Hiemstra et al.'s (1983) study, but strongly disagrees with Robinson et al.'s (1995) finding of only 2.4% of 'older' characters portrayed alone. The next most occurring positioning of 'older' characters in this study was 1) with other adults (39%), 2) with mixed ages and with children (both 5%) and 3) with other 'older' adults (2.1%).

One great difference between this study's results and Swayne & Greco's (1987) study, but is similar to Robinson et al.'s (1995) study is the settings of 'older' characters in the advertisements. In this study, the most popular setting was outdoors (43.2%), followed by business/work (18.7%), other, unlisted settings (12.2%), restaurants (10.8%), home (7.9%), studios (5%), and stores (2.2%). Swayne & Greco's (1987) study found that home was the most popular setting, with 56% of 'older' characters being shown there.

However, similarly to Swayne & Greco's study, 'older' people generally had major roles in advertisements, with 49.6% of those being primary roles, followed by minor roles (40.3%) and background roles (10.1%).

Additionally, I found that, overall, 'older' persons are being shown as active/healthy (53 characters), competent/intelligent (42 characters), and happy/content (41 characters) much more often than they are shown as angry/mad (15 characters) or sick/feeble (3 characters).

Some conclusions can be drawn from the results of this research. First, although 'older' people are still underrepresented in television advertising, the number of 'older' characters being used in comparison to the number of commercials shown has risen,

which seems to show some consideration on the part of advertisers for the 'older' market as viable consumers. Second, the number of 'older' males shown continues to outweigh 'older' females shown, which paints a false picture of reality, and reflects poorly on advertising's view of women, since the number of 'older' females is far greater than the number of 'older' males (U.S. Census, 2). Next, the fact that 'older' people are still being portrayed as alone is also a somewhat false and negative depiction, as many 'older' people are parents and grandparents who are in contact with their families a great deal. Finally, the fact that 'older' characters are being portrayed more often in outdoor settings, and being shown as happy, content, competent, intelligent, healthy, and active shows that advertisers are moving in the right directions by positively showing these 'older' citizens in an attempt to capture this ever-growing market of consumers.

Some problems encountered in this study included the use of fast-action camera movement and multiple scenes in some of the advertisements that were viewed. Both techniques made it difficult to appropriately count and identify 'older' characters versus other characters. Also, because this study focused only on national advertisements rather than both local and regional advertisements, the coder had to consult parties in other areas of the United States to learn whether some commercials were regional, local, or national, and whether or not to include them in the study.

Recommended future research would be to study the portrayal of 'older' characters during prime-time television shows, rather than just commercials, to see if the results in how 'older' characters are portrayed change in any way. Also, it would be interesting to compare the portrayal of 'older' characters in prime-time television

advertising to their portrayal during daytime or morning advertising to note any differences in how they are viewed.

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APPENDIX

Content Analysis Form

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Network:

____ ABC ____ FOX ____ CBS ____ NBC

Brand of Product _____

Category of Product _____

.....

Number of people in ad _____

Number of older people in ad _____ If 0, STOP.

Number of older males _____

Number of older females _____

.....

*Approximate age of older person(s):

____ 50-59 ____ 60-69 ____ 70-79 ____ 80+

*Race of older person(s):

____ W ____ B ____ As ____ His ____ Other

*Is the older person(s) a celebrity ____ yes ____ no

*Ad was aimed at persons:

____ under 18 ____ 18-49 ____ 50+ ____ all

*Older person(s) was/were:

____ alone ____ w/ children only

____ w/ all older people ____ w/ mixed ages

____ w/ other adults

*Older person(s) has/have a:

____ major role ____ minor role ____ background role

*Older person(s) was/were cast as a:

_____ husband/wife	_____ worker/employee
_____ parent	_____ consumer
_____ grandparent	_____ none
_____ owner/boss	_____ other _____

*The portrayal of the older person(s) was:

_____ active/healthy	_____ sexy/macho
_____ sick/feeble	_____ angry/disgruntled
_____ competent/intelligent	_____ happy/content
_____ humorous/comical	_____ other _____

*Setting older person(s) was/were placed in:

_____ home	_____ entertainment facility
_____ business/work	_____ studio
_____ outdoors	_____ store
_____ restaurant	_____ other

*Overall portrayal of the older person(s) was:

_____ positive	_____ negative
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